

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims (~~striketrough~~ and double brackets ([[]]) indicating deletion and underline indicating insertion) as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of using an electronic communications network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communications between the sender and the recipient, the method comprising the steps of:
linking a sound file to an emoticon contained in a sender-generated message;
forwarding the emoticon and ~~its~~ a link to the sound file to the recipient, the link to the sound file associated with the emoticon;
determining if the recipient already has the sound file, and if not sending the sound file to the recipient; and
at the recipient, displaying the emoticon and audibly playing the sound file linked to the emoticon,
wherein the linking occurs at the server according to user preferences stored on the server where the user preferences may be periodically updated by the sender, the updating occurring by obtaining different sound files from the server and replacing one or more of a set of default sound files stored in the user preferences.
2. (Cancelled)
3. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises making a dynamic association, established by the sender, for that particular message being sent.
4. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises automatically generating a link according to the particular emoticon being sent.
5. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises automatically generating a link according to the combination of the particular emoticon being sent and the particular recipient.

6. (Cancelled)
7. (Cancelled)
8. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises attaching the sound file to the message, and wherein the step of forwarding comprises forwarding both the message and the sound file.
9. (Original) A method as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the step of linking comprises creating a pointer to a sound file and attaching the pointer to the message.
10. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in Claim 8 wherein the step of forwarding comprises forwarding the sound file in a MIME-encoded attachment.
11. – 12. (Cancelled)
13. (Withdrawn) A method of using an electronic communication network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communication between the sender and recipient, the method comprising the steps of:
 - associating a sound file with an emoticon;
 - sending the emoticon to the server;
 - sending the emoticon from the server to the recipient;
 - determining if the recipient needs the sound file, and if so forwarding this sound file to the recipient; and
 - playing the sound file at the recipient when the emoticon is displayed.
14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for use in an electronic communications network, in which a sender can send a message to a recipient, the network including a server for facilitating communications between the sender and the recipient, the apparatus comprising:

first logic configured to link a sound file to an emoticon contained in a sender-generated message;

second logic configured to forward the emoticon and ~~its~~ a link to the sound file to the recipient, the link to the sound file associated with the emoticon;

third logic configured to determine if the recipient already has the sound file and if not send the sound file to the recipient; and

fourth logic configured to display, at the recipient, the emoticon and audibly play the sound file linked to the emoticon,

wherein the linking occurs at the server according to user preferences stored on the server where the user preferences may be periodically updated by the sender, the updating occurring by obtaining different sound files from the server and replacing one or more of a set of default sound files stored in the user preferences.

16. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs the linking using a dynamic association, established by the sender, for that particular message being sent.

17. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by automatically generating a link according to the particular emoticon being sent.

18. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by automatically generating a link according to the combination of the particular emoticon being sent and the particular recipient.

19. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic comprises a communications server in communication with the sender and with the recipient.

20. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein a computer of the sender comprises the first logic.
21. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by attaching the sound file to the message, and wherein the second logic forwards both the message and the sound file.
22. (Original) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 15, wherein the first logic performs linking by creating a pointer to a sound file and attaching the pointer to the message.
23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in Claim 21, wherein the second logic forwards the sound file in the form of an MIME-encoded attachment.
24. (Cancelled)
25. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium encoded with a computer program for linking an emoticon to a sound file, the computer-readable medium comprising:
first instructions for linking an emoticon to a particular sound file;
second instructions for causing the emoticon and link to the sound file to be forwarded to the recipient;
third instructions for determining if the recipient already has the sound file and if not sending the sound file to the recipient; and
fourth instructions for displaying, at the recipient, the emoticon and audibly playing the sound file linked to the emoticon,
wherein the linking occurs at a server according to user preferences stored on the server where the user preferences may be periodically updated by a sender, the updating occurring by obtaining different sound files from the server and replacing one or more of a set of default sound files stored in the user preferences.
26. – 27. (Cancelled)